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PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

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MARCH 2, 1973

FRIDAY

In the Briefing Room
At the White House
Washington, D.C.

THE PRESIDENT: I have one announcement for those who are members of the traveling press.

We have now set the date for the San Clemente meeting with President Thieu, and it will be April 2nd and 3rd. Those of you who desire to go should make your plans, if you could, to leave on the Friday before, because I am going to California to attend a dinner on that occasion for John Ford on Saturday night and the meetings will start the following Tuesday and will be concluded that week.

I will take any other questions you have.

QUESTION: Mr. President, there has been considerable speculation in the interpretation of the Laos cease-fire pact to the effect that the Communists gained more out of that than they did out of the Geneva Accords, and also a situation in Cambodia that no one seems to be able to interpret. Originally you hinged your peace settlement on all of Indochina.

What is your expectation in these areas, and how much confidence do you have that stability will be maintained?

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Sheldon, first with regard to Laos, the agreement there was made by the Royal Laotian Government, and it is an agreement which, of course, we supported and we accept. I have noted that various elements within Laos have questioned the decision by Souvanna Phouma to make the agreement that he did, but the key to that agreement, and what makes the cease-fire work is an unequivocal provision in the agreement that we made; that is, for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Laos. We expect that to be adhered to, and when that is adhered to, we believe that the chances for peace in Laos will be very considerable, and considerably more than after the '54 accords.

As I have pointed out, and as Dr. Kissinger has also pointed out, the situation in Cambodia is more complex because you don't have the governmental forces there that can negotiate with each other. However, there has been an attempt on the part of the Cambodian Government to have a unilateral cease-fire that has not been reciprocated on the part of the opposition forces in that area. Once a cease-fire is agreed to or adhered to, we will observe it. Until it is adhered to, we, of course, will provide support for the Cambodian Government.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, now that the Watergate case is over, the trial is over, can you give us your view on the verdict and what implications you see in the verdict on public confidence in the political system?

THE PRESIDENT: No, it would not be proper for me to comment on the case when it not only is not over, but particularly when it is also on appeal.

I will simply say with regard to the Watergate case what I have said previously that the investigation conducted by Mr. Dean, the White House counsel, in which, incidentally, he had access to the FBI records on this particular matter because I directed him to conduct this investigation, indicates that no one on the White House staff, at the time he conducted the investigation -- that was last July and August -- was involved or had knowledge of the Watergate matter and, as far as the balance of the case is concerned, it is now under investigation by a Congressional committee and that committee should go forward, conduct its investigation in an even-handed way, going into charges made against both candidates, both political parties and if it does, as Senator Ervin has indicated it will, we will, of course cooperate with the committee just as we cooperated with the Grand Jury.

QUESTION: Mr. President, yesterday at the Gray hearings, Senator Tunney suggested he might ask the committee to ask for John Dean to appear before that hearing to talk about the Watergate case and the FBI-White House relationship. Would you object to that?

THE PRESIDENT: Of course.

QUESTION: Why?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, because it is Executive Privilege. I mean you can't -- I, of course -- no President could ever agree to allow the Counsel to the President to go down and testify before a committee.

On the other hand, as far as any committee of the Congress is concerned, where information is requested that a member of the White House staff may have, we will make arrangements to provide that information, but members of the White House staff, in that position at least, cannot be brought before a Congressional committee in a formal hearing for testimony. I stand on the same position every President has stood on.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President.

QUESTION: Mr. President, on that particular point, if the Counsel was involved --

THE PRESIDENT: He also gets two.

QUESTION: -- if the Counsel was involved in an illegal or improper act and the prima facie case came to light, then would you change the rules relative to the White House Counsel?

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THE PRESIDENT: I do not expect that to happen and if it should happen I would have to answer that question at that point.

Let me say, too, that I know that, since you are on your feet, Clark, that you had asked about the Executive Privilege statement and we will have that available toward the end of next week or the first of the following week, for sure, because obviously, the Ervin Committee is interested in that statement and that will answer, I think, some of the questions with regard to how information can be obtained from a member of the White House staff, but consistent with Executive Privilege.

THE PRESS: Thank you again.

END

(AT 11:40 A.M. EST)